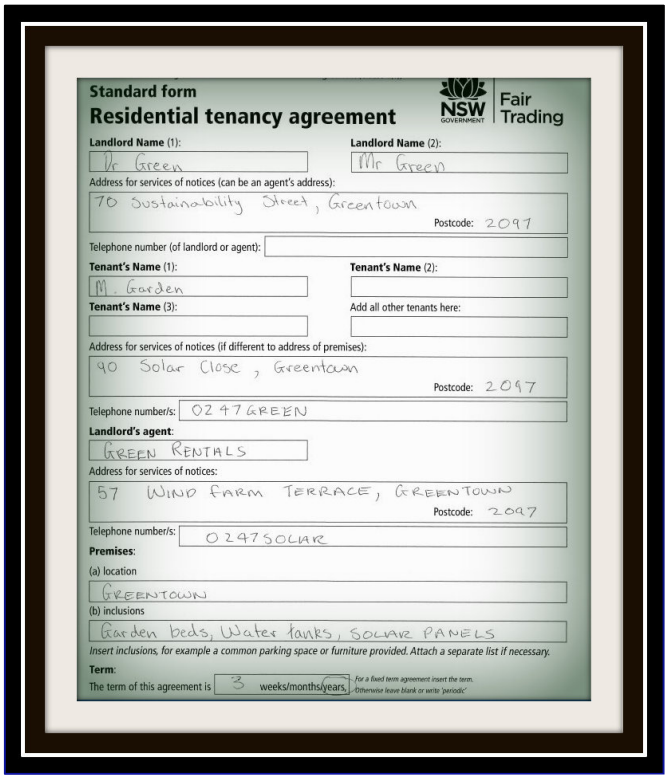
Climate change and the rental sector: Sustainability and the Housing Manager

Briefing Paper TWELVE



Standard form
Residential tenancy agreement
NSW GOVERNMENT Fair Trading

Landlord Name (1): Mr Green
Landlord Name (2): Mr Green
Address for services of notices (can be an agent's address): 70 Sustainability Street, Greentown
Postcode: 2097
Telephone number (of landlord or agent):
Tenant's Name (1): M. Garden
Tenant's Name (2):
Tenant's Name (3):
Add all other tenants here:
Address for services of notices (if different to address of premises): 90 Solar Close, Greentown
Postcode: 2097
Telephone number/s: 0247GREEN
Landlord's agent: GREEN RENTALS
Address for services of notices: 57 WIND FARM TERRACE, GREENTOWN
Postcode: 2097
Telephone number/s: 0297SOLAR
Premises:
(a) location: GREENTOWN
(b) inclusions: Garden beds, Water tanks, SOLAR PANELS
Insert inclusions, for example a common parking space or furniture provided. Attach a separate list if necessary.
Term:
The term of this agreement is 3 weeks/months/years. For a fixed term agreement insert the term. Otherwise leave blank or write 'periodic'

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SUSTAINING RENTAL LIFE SERIES NOTE

The Briefing Paper series of the '**Rental housing, climate change and adaptive capacity: a case study of Newcastle NSW'** project seeks to provide readers with access to current research on rental sector adaptation to climate change. Briefing Papers produced by the project team are working documents that provide a forum on theoretical, methodological and practical issues related to climate change adaption in rental housing. The project is funded by the National Climate change Adaptation Facility (NCCARF) for 2012. The publication as a 'Briefing Paper' does not preclude subsequent publication in scholarly journals, books or reports. Unless otherwise stated, 'Rental housing, climate change and adaptive capacity' publications are presented as contributions to debate and discussion and represent our developing thinking about the research. We are hoping that they may facilitate feedback from readers, researchers, renters and housing managers.

Briefing Papers are available in electronic format and may be downloaded from the Sustaining Rental Life website:

http://www.newcastle.edu.au//research-centre/urban-and- regional-studies

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Contents

1. Summary

Our research project explores the barriers, assets, and capacities that tenants, housing managers, and landlords bring to climate change adaptation in the rental sector. In particular, it explores these actors as active agents in the adaptation process. Understanding the roles of tenants, property managers and landlords requires engagement with theorisations of their capacities, interests, and experiences. This briefing paper expands on the themes outlined in Briefing Paper 11 by exploring research specifically into sustainability and property management, including:

- *the ways that property managers may be influenced to incorporate sustainability into their practices*
- *ways in which property managers have been positioned as able to exert influence over the sustainability of other actors in the property market*
- *the capacities that property managers have to enhance the sustainability performance of buildings themselves.*

2. Introduction

Briefing Paper 11 addressed theoretical positionings of housing managers: how their role has been understood discursively. This section focuses on the extent to which property managers have been theorised as active agents in initiatives to render buildings more sustainable. It does so by mirroring the structure of Briefing Paper 11, and provides examples from diverse research that shows the influences on housing managers, and those spheres that can be influenced by housing managers, including tenant practice and building maintenance. Reviewing literature in this area allows a more nuanced positioning of housing managers in relation to environmental initiatives, adding to the broader theorising reviewed in Briefing Paper 11.

This paper draws on themes from two bodies of research:

- *sustainable housing*
- *greening the commercial sector.*

The paper briefly outlines the sorts of case studies this research has examined, elaborating on some of the key differences between the function of housing managers in the case studies and the function of housing managers in Australia. It then reviews this literature for themes around the capacities of housing managers to enable sustainability, particularly in terms of the ways these articles see housing managers as enabling enhanced sustainability. These articles are not framed through a lens of adaptive capacity, but we can (perhaps tenuously) consider them through this lens by focusing on the opportunities they indicate for housing managers to pursue sustainability objectives though their work.

Various studies suggest that housing managers can both innovate and resist change. Kyrö et al. (2011) suggest, for instance, that "managers seem to lack the willingness to become forerunners in environmental and energy related practices" (2011: 509). On the other hand, Christudason's case study of legislation on environmental practices within property management in Singapore recognises property managers as "catalyst[s] for change" (Christudason 2002). Both cases acknowledge the important and complex role played by the property manager, and that this can vary depending on the housing context.

This paper assembles insights into:

1. Influences on the housing manager to enhance sustainability through their practices
2. The capacity of housing managers to influence the sustainability practices of tenants and other actors
3. The capacity of property managers to influence the performance of buildings.

3. Scope and limits of available literature

There has been little attention in academic work to conceptualising sustainable housing (Winston 2009; Priemus 2005), and even less to sustainable housing in the rental sector. Brown and Bhatti (2003), in their review of environmental issues in housing studies make reference to the role of

housing practitioners in connecting environmental concerns with housing:

> *… the assumption during these heady 'green' times was that housing practitioners, policy makers and academics could simply incorporate environmental issues into traditional housing concerns, and there would be progress. From a policy and practice perspective this has been relatively successful (although more could be done); but from a theoretical perspective it has been a failure (Brown and Bhatti 2003: 507 - 508).*

While some policy and practice exists around sustainable housing, previous briefing papers and literature reviews have demonstrated that for climate change in the rental sector in the Australian context, housing practitioners, and housing managers in particular, have not experienced significant exposure to policies and practices that seek to enhance the adaptive capacity of the rental sector. Unsurprisingly, then, the role of housing managers in this area has also been under-theorised in housing studies literature.

There are, however, some references to the role of property managers in enabling sustainable developments although as Priemus (2005) and Winston (2009) assert, the capacities of housing managers to contribute to sustainable development has been largely overlooked. There is however a small body of work in Europe that considers the role of housing managers and professional landlords in energy efficiency and energy reduction (Smid and Nieboer 2008; Kyrö et al. 2011; Kyrö et al. 2012; Stenberg et al. 2009; Femenías and van Hal 2009). This work is quite specific to the type of dwellings and the styles of housing management in their case study areas. Nevertheless, this work provides insights into what the role of the housing manager is understood to be, and what capacities they have to influence the sustainability of dwellings and the practices of residents.

Indeed, there are some fundamental distinctions between existing research into sustainable housing and property managers, and our project. The remainder of this section will therefore briefly describe the sorts of empirical case studies featured in this research.

Firstly, some work offers examinations of sustainable housing generally in a particular locale and in order to untangle some of the murkiness of defining sustainable housing (such as Priemus' (2005) review of the Dutch sustainable housing policy). Other work considers sustainable housing through the lens of particular urban processes, such as Winston's consideration of sustainable housing in urban regeneration (Winston 2009), and Stenberg et al.'s (2009) consideration of housing regeneration in Sweden. Much of the remainder of the literature in these categories emerges from two types of case studies: those which consider social housing, retrofitting and energy efficiency in European countries (Smid and Nieboer 2008; Femenías and van Hal 2009), and work which considers the role of housing managers in reducing energy consumption of apartment buildings in Helsinki (Kyrö et al. 2011; Kyrö et al. 2012). Before identifying some of the common themes in this research, it should be noted that there are several

ways that the rental sector which is the subject of these case studies differs from our case study.

First, work which looks at social housing (Smid and Nieboer 2008; Femenías and van Hal 2009) is based in countries with a markedly different social housing sector to Australia, both in terms of the proportion of rental stock constituted by social housing and in the way this is administered. Perhaps the most important difference to note is that in the Netherlands and Sweden, social housing constitutes a much larger proportion of rental stock than Australia.

Furthermore, while social housing in Australia is administered through state agencies, housing associations and municipal housing companies are much more heavily involved in the provision and management of social housing throughout Europe. Another point of distinction that warrants consideration is the function of the 'housing manager', for example in Kyrö et al.'s (2011; 2012) work on the role housing managers in 'multi-family housing companies'. In Finland, housing companies can employ professional housing managers to act as CEOs of the housing companies they manage (Kyrö et al. 2012: 204). Housing companies themselves are constituted by the homeowners, who become share-holders in the housing company that manages and maintains the buildings. In this, they seem not unlike the strata management in the Australian context.

Despite these differences, this literature offers important synergies with our research: it helps us in this paper to further theorise the role of the housing manager and the potential connections between this role and improving sustainability in the rental sector.

4. Influences on housing managers

As Briefing Paper 11 observed, housing managers are subject to a diverse array of influences. In this section, we discuss how property manager's practices are influenced toward sustainability. We discuss examples where legislative changes have altered the remit of property managers, the impact of organisational cultures on housing managers, and how their personal viewpoints can influence the extent to which sustainability concerns are integrated into their housing management practices.

Legislation and policy

Research into sustainability and housing management also draws out the role of legislation in steering housing managers' practice to address specific environmental concerns and building features. Smid and Nieboer (2008) consider how energy efficiency can be incorporated into the asset management practices of Dutch social housing landlords in response to an EU EPBD policy directive. They note the importance of legislation in influencing the actions of property managers in this respect to address issues surrounding sustainability and climate change:

- in terms of how the physical stock is managed
- in terms of how this information is communicated to tenants.

… professional landlords can significantly contribute to governmental policies by improving the energy performance of their

housing stock… [E]nergy conservation should be integrated in all phases of the strategic asset management processes. With professional landlords facing tightening energy performance requirements, the EPBD legislation could be considered as an opportunity and, at the same time, a means for professional landlords to incorporate energy conservation in their strategic asset management (Smid and Nieboer 2008: 31).

In this example, policy and legislative changes are seen as a positive way of driving changes to housing management.

However research into sustainable housing in particular has noted some of the tensions that housing managers and other actors can face in the implementation of legislative and regulatory processes. Stenberg et al.'s (2009) evaluation of the environmental and social aspects of urban regeneration programs concludes that there are limitations to the capacity of some formal regulatory tools to adequately address the complexity of the programs. Using their research into how technical systems were integrated into buildings, they suggest that programs and interventions can prove insufficient when they fail to adequately incorporate social elements, such as planning processes and participation by users in program design, and that these ought to "influence how authorities design interventions and funding systems" (Stenberg et al. 2009: 542).

Another way that housing managers have been framed in research into sustainable housing is in relation to shifts in organisational practices and cultures, and the housing management styles of practitioners. This was discussed in Briefing Paper 11. These observations offer insights into both housing managers' individual practices and motivations for driving change, and the importance of sector and organisation wide capacities for driving change. This section briefly outlines how research in this area has:

- *connected personal perspectives and management styles*
- *connected organisational cultures with a willingness (or otherwise) to enable change.*

We can examine the insights that emerge from this research with an eye to enhancing our understanding of the role property managers, the assets and capacities that they draw on, and barriers to adaptation in the rental sector.

Individual perspectives

Research on the role of social housing managers emphasises the importance of individual practitioners' subjectivities and perspectives in enacting change. This is also evident in research focused on the challenges of implementing sustainability into buildings and building management. Kyrö et al.'s (2011; 2012) work pays particular attention to housing management styles in terms of the role that housing managers play in their buildings' environmental performance. They view housing managers, in their case study of Helsinki, as well-placed to address energy performance of buildings because they have the financial information, consumption data, and professional expertise to reduce building energy consumption. They

propose three categories of attitudes of housing managers:

- *caring*
- *professional*
- *uninformed.*

The 'caring' category was used for housing managers who expressed a strong concern about the environmental impacts of buildings, including maintenance and management, and about the ability of managers to influence this impact through their own actions.

The most common type, 'professional', consisted of housing managers who "generally felt environmental issues should be considered, but only to the extent financially and socially reasonable" (Kyrö et al. 2011: 206). These managers held perspectives such as the payback time of improvements being too long, and felt constrained by finances and time.

Finally, the 'uninformed' management style included ignorance, and aversion to incorporating energy-efficiency improvements into buildings and management practices.

The authors' quantitative analysis of building performance suggested a positive relationship between the perspective of the housing manager and environmental building performance. They argue that, despite the limitations of the research "the results suggest a combination of technical solutions and managerial practices is likely to lead to best results" (Kyrö et al. 2012: 209). That particular perspectives can influence the management style of property managers, is, they suggest, important in mobilising environmentally friendly management practices.

Organisational culture

Other work considers organisational cultures more broadly and how these are performed by particular practitioners, and communicated between practitioners, and between practitioners and tenants. Femenias and van Hal (2009) examine housing associations as 'drivers for change'. They focus on both the "behavioural predisposing 'culture' in the permanent organisation and on [housing managers'] behavioural response to innovation in a project situation". They also point to the importance of management strategies in influencing the success of retrofitting projects, including:

> *… the motivation and conditions under which the transformation is initiated, the trust that is built up between [the housing association] and the residents and the engagement of the residents, the role of [the housing association] as a change agent for innovation, and the procurement processes used by [the housing association] (Femenías and van Hal 2009: 1).*

The authors also pay particular attention to the organisational cultures that can support these changes and the role of individual housing managers within this, that is:

> *… the relation between the temporary project [retrofitting] and the permanent organisations regarding on the one hand decision-making and the other hand knowledge transfer and diffusion of results. The decision-making processes relating the role of the*

individual employee and the relation to the housing association needs further studies. Regarding learning and diffusion of experiences from building projects, this is often relying on individuals and networks and not systematically organised (e.g. van Hal 2000; Femenias 2004) (Femenías and van Hal 2009).

Other research also points to the importance of relationships within the organisation, and of incorporating knowledge systems into both formal and informal organisations surrounding housing company employees and tenants, such as social networks (Stenberg et al. 2009: 549). This work recognises the importance of embedding environmental practices in both organisational cultures and everyday practices, for both housing manager and tenants.

5. Influencing people and relationships

Property managers have the capacity to influence other actors in the rental sector, and, as Briefing Paper 11 observed, the relationships in which these interactions take place involve a broad suite of tensions, negotiations, and complexities. The previous briefing paper explored this in relation to the different ways actors in the rental market may be empowered to act (or not). In this section, we look at examples where property managers have sought to influence tenant practice in order to enhance the sustainability of dwellings.

Briefing Paper 11 noted the important, and under-examined, role of property managers in mediating the relationship between landlords and tenants. Limited literature points to the importance of this role in relation to sustainability, and suggests that these relationships may be characterised by a high degree of tension. For instance, Gabriel et al. (2010), in their research into the sustainability of Australia's private rental market, observe that tenants were hesitant to pursue sustainable adaptations to their rental properties for fear of putting landlords or property managers offside (2010: 4). Such observations are clearly consistent with the theorisations of dynamics between landlords/property managers and tenants noted in Briefing Paper 11. Moreover, the authors note the importance of negotiations *between* these three actors as an important factor in successful audit and retrofit initiatives, and identify scope for greater engagement with property managers.

Stenberg et al.'s (2009) research on projects to enhance sustainability of housing, evaluates efforts to change tenant practice that were also part of these programs. They point to waste as one area where housing companies had (moderate) success in altering 'behaviour patterns' as some residents adapted to sorting recyclables. There needs to be a note of caution when considering the role that housing managers can play in relation to tenant practices, especially when framed, as it is by Stenberg et al. (2009: 550), in terms of "inspir[ing] more people to change their behaviour". This can risk echoing some of the more paternalistic themes evident in the Octavia Hill management style, discussed in Briefing Paper 11, where housing managers were tasked with improving the behaviours of tenants.

Another way that housing managers are seen as having the capacity to encourage a change in tenant practice is via labelling systems that provide information about the energy efficiency of housing stock. Smid and Nieboer (2008) consider enrolling labelling in this capacity as part of their focus on integrating energy conservation into the maintenance and renovation practices of housing managers. They suggest this as part of developing a methodology for Dutch Social Housing Landlords that draws on the European Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (EPBD). The EPBD requires the use of energy certificates that provide information on the current energy performance of the building and possibilities for improving its energy performance, supplied when the building is new and whenever it is sold (Smid and Nieboer 2008: 19). The Netherlands requires these certificates to be paired with a label that classifies the energy performance of a dwelling.

Such certificates and labels, the authors suggest, are a means for housing management to communicate "with its stakeholders and tenants about energy performance and conservation measures. Especially the tenants play an important role in the appraisal of the EPBD energy labelling system" (Smid and Nieboer 2008: 22). EPBD labels, "can raise [tenants'] awareness about energy consumption and influence their behaviour regarding energy consumption, but it does not improve the energy efficiency of housing stock" (2008: 32). In this system both the property manager and the tenant are positioned as having the capacity to contribute to the energy performance of the building. Moreover, in both the examples discussed here, influencing tenant behaviour is not independent but is interconnected with legislative or technical changes.

Finally, some research considers how the commercial sector has adopted green leases. While this may not be smoothly transferrable to the residential rental sector, it offers some insights into how such leases are managed and how effective they can be. Moreover, discussions of green leases, property management and sustainability in the commercial sector address similar themes to those emerging in literature concerned with sustainable housing, including:

- *the role of legislation in driving change*
- *the role of information and education*
- *innovation in housing management practices*
- *property manager-commercial tenant relationships.*

Jayne et al (2007) review the response of professionals involved in property management of industrial buildings, to UK legislation that stipulates strict liability provisions around environmental contamination; this legislation applies to tenants, landlords, and managers of industrial buildings. The authors explore current practices and make recommendations to inform best practice in environmental management of industrial buildings. There are common experiences of enacting environmental legislation in the industrial sector and in the residential sector. Jayne et.al argue that particular legislative changes may require greater attention to the ways specific

environmental impacts are negotiated in leases. They note for instance that property owners and managers may need to provide more detail on how they manage their buildings, while industrial companies may be required to provide more information on their environmental philosophy, and, potentially, details such environmental compliance records. The authors also identify a potential role for property managers and real estate agents in compliance with legislation; however thus far property managers have generally received little environmental education and training and may not include information for incoming tenants about past environmental uses of the buildings, a likely barrier to tenants or prospective purchasers in complying with the legislation (Jayne et al. 2007: 365).

In identifying the issue of education and information on environmental matters in property management, Jayne et al suggest the development of a best practice environmental handbook to help overcome this barrier, and to improve management practices. While the sorts of information and training would vary greatly between residential and commercial sectors, it has emerged as a need in both sectors. Indeed, Gabriel et al's (2010) research into the environmental sustainability of Australia's private residential rental stock identify a "lack of knowledge among landlords, tenants, and real estate agents about the sustainability profile of properties" (Gabriel et al. 2010: 2).

Finally, research points to the economic motivation for green leases. Jayne et al (2007) focus on the higher rentals and values made possible through better environmental management of industrial buildings (Jayne et al. 2007: 376). Elsewhere, an article in the American *Journal of Property Management* (Rosenberg 2008) indicates that the property industry (in the U.S. at least) sees a role for property management in the commercial sector in improving energy efficiency (primarily for financial reasons). This article considers property managers as innovators, suggesting they have in some instances pre-empted legislation (Rosenberg 2008: 37-38). There is scope, then, for bringing the experiences of commercial property managers into a conversation about residential property managers in order to suggest synergies for enhancing adaptation capacity in the rental sector. Although there is potential for drawing on learnings from the commercial sector, these cannot be unproblematically transferred to the rental sector. Under commercial leases, tenants have greater scope to initiate improvements, whereas landlord initiated improvements for energy efficiency in the rental housing sector are more likely to result in higher rents. Thus, while improvements are desirable, the consequent rent increases can be problematic.

6. Influencing Buildings

Finally, we consider literature on sustainability and property managers in terms of the capacity for housing managers to initiate building-wide material and technical changes. This section highlights the motivation for, and management of, material and technical changes, the role of maintenance and technical changes, the potential to over-rely on material and technical systems, and the limitations of such changes.

First, the literature points to ways that property managers are able to manage the buildings and the technical systems integrated in the buildings in such a way as to generate particular outcomes. Smid and Nieober (2008) focused on the integration of energy conservation into professional landlords' maintenance and renovation practices, using the example of Dutch Social Landlords. They note a willingness to improve the energy efficiency of their stock *despite* the financial cost, pointing to motivations such as increased market value of energy efficient stock, decreased living costs for social housing residents and enhanced living comfort of the homes, generated through energy measures such as insulation (Smid and Nieboer 2008: 20). They focus largely on scoping out a methodology for professional landlords, in particular, Dutch social landlords, to use in implementing such changes. They suggest a recognition of the capacities of professional landlords (albeit at an institutional level) and the role they can play in adapting buildings in particular ways.

Another body of work that considers the capacity of housing managers to reduce greenhouse emissions, primarily through their capacity to reduce the emissions of the building they manage, is Kyrö et al.'s research on the role of professional housing managers and energy efficiency in existing housing (Kyrö et al. 2011; Kyrö et al. 2012). Their work is primarily informed by an interest in housing management styles and practices and their influence on building performance (discussed earlier in this paper), but is mentioned here because it sees the capacity of the housing manager to intervene at the scale of the building, through, for instance, maintenance practices, rather than through interactions with residents[1]. Kyrö et al. also point to the importance of the building characteristics themselves, and other work emphasises the potential for property managers to enhance the environmental performance of buildings through their capacity to intervene at the material level of the building. Christudason (2002) observes that property managers' attempts to generate sustainable housing can be let down by the failure of building maintenance to retain environmental standards. There is potential for property managers to implement more sustainable practices to maintain the condition of the building, public utilities, and other services (Christudason 2002: 252).

Stenberg et al. (2009) take a different approach. They evaluated social and environmental regeneration programs carried out in Sweden across ten housing projects (nine municipal housing companies and one partly a tenant-owner association). They note that there are benefits to technical systems implemented by housing associations, especially as they remain in place after the regeneration program has finished. However, their evaluation suggests that there may have been over-reliance on technical systems and interventions in attempts to change

[1] Elsewhere, the authors argue that building occupants have little influence over energy consumption in district heated apartment buildings and that housing managers have a far greater capacity to influence this consumption than the building occupants, in part because of the material systems of heating, etc. prominent in Helsinki, that are controlled by building managers. This is worth noting due to the lack of capacity they credit tenants with. Of note, also, is that many residents in such examples are owner occupiers rather than renters.

residents' energy use, without appropriate consultation and communication with tenants:

> *Most of the employees did not put great effort into checking whether the information actually reached the tenants and were not prepared to engage in dialogue with tenants about the new systems. In addition, the tenant's active participation in these development processes was quite rare with notable exceptions. Clearly, this lack of focus on information, dialogue and participation caused many problems (Stenberg et al. 2009: 548).*

In particular:

> *In most cases, energy and water solutions were treated as a matter for housing company experts. Consequently, the tenants' influence with regard to these topics was less than their influence over, e.g. the function and design of the external environment. However, there were examples where employees stressed the importance of communicating with tenants concerning technical issues. In one project, the property manager followed the tenants' energy and water use through a remote supervision system. When the use was higher than usual, the manager spoke directly with the tenant to discover the reason and gave the tenant a chance to change their behaviour. This case shows how a technical system can support learning and save energy. However, typically, technical systems supported top-down control and inhibited tenants' control over the learning process, individually and as a group (Stenberg et al. 2009: 549).*

This research suggests that a focus on retrofitting the dwelling alone for sustainability and climate change is insufficient, as it overlooks the way tenants interact with their residences. The relationship between residents, property managers, their dwellings, and newly retrofitted technical systems can entail additional complexities in the case of multi-dwelling buildings. For example, Stenberg et al.'s work shows that new laundry and rubbish disposal systems had varying measures of success dependent on a range of factors including:

- *the extent to which changes were communicated to residents*
- *the extent to which the changes enhanced residents comfort and enjoyment of their dwelling*
- *the ways technical changes could be integrated into existing habits of tenants (Stenberg et al. 2009).*

Implicit in this work is the notion that the success of technical changes can be limited when the social relationships through which they are enacted are inadequate or inappropriate. As observed in the previous section on the capacity for property managers to influence the practices of their tenants, it is essential to recognise the integration of practice and materiality in attempts to render the rental sector more sustainable.

7. Conclusions

This briefing paper has scoped out different empirical examples of the role played by housing managers in enhancing the sustainability of the housing sector they work within. It has observed a suite of instances where housing managers' practices have

changed because of revisions to policy and organisational cultures, and examples where property managers have sought to influence both residents and buildings. Perhaps most relevant for our research, it has noted the importance of greater attention to the relationships between actors involved in the rental sector, the importance of different motivations for these changes (including economic motivations, legislative changes, and personal perspectives), and the importance of acknowledging the links between technical changes to buildings and everyday practice.

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